DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 362 691 CE 064 704

TITLE	Languages in Further Education.
INSTITUTION	Further Education Unit, London (England).
REPORT NO	FEU-007; ISBN-1-85338-309-0
PUB DATE	Aug 93
NOTE	7p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Faculty Development; Foreign Countries; Job Skills; Job Training; Language Teachers; Postsecondary Education; Second Language Instruction; *Second Language Learning; *Second Languages; Staff Development; Student Motivation; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS	European Community

ABSTRACT

Five British colleges and one adult education center specializing in language work took part in a project to identify issues, developments, and interesting practices in teaching, learning, and accreditation of languages in further education. A feasibility study revealed key issues that served as a focus for the project. All colleges felt that providing a vocational focus for language learning was essential, but that flexible and relevant learning materials and resources were needed. All colleges were enthusiastic about the value of links in other European countries in enabling students to extend their experiences of the language they were studying. The issue of progression in language studies after age 16 remained important. Colleges generally agreed that languages should be included as a core skill, were well placed to meet the developing needs of industries seeking to extend commercial activity in the European Community, and offered a language component in most vocational sectors traditionally associated with the further education sector. Validation of language courses was seen as a crucial influence on student motivation. Healthy levels of staff development were found in all colleges. The organization and management of languages provision merited investigation. Recent national developments in languages were introduction of a Modern Foreign Language as a National Curriculum Foundation Subject, formation of the Languages Lead Body, and inclusion of languages in some General National Vocational Qualifications. (YLB)

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August 1993

LANGUAGES IN FURTHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

The Single European Market has had a significant influence in encouraging colleges to 'Europeanise' their curriculum, one obvious example of which is the inclusion of Languages in an increasing number of programmes. National initiatives in the teaching, learning and accreditation of Languages through, for example, developments in the National Curriculum (NC), the formation of a Languages Lead Body (LLB), demand for customised language training from industry and possibilities for incorporating Languages into National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) programmes have further contributed to its raised profile on college agendas.

Together, these factors prompted the Further Education Unit (FEU) to undertake a project **'The teaching, learning and accreditation of Languages in further education'** (RP678) in order to identify issues, developments and interesting practice.

This bulletin draws together various strands of that project plus other FEU Language work in order to:

- highlight some key issues relating to the teaching, learning and accreditation of languages in FE;
- report on the findings of RP678;
- display case-study material from colleges;
- summarise recent national developments;
- invite you to respond.

It is aimed at practitioners and managers involved in designing and delivering languages programmes for post-16 learners.

Note on terminology

Modern Languages, Foreign Languages, Modern Foreign Languages and, simply, Languages are all terms currently used by educational national bodies when referring to the study of a language other than one's native tongue. In this bulletin FEU uses a range of terms but without intending to imply any distinction between them.

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THE PROJECT

Five colleges and one adult education centre specialising in language work took part in the project (see p.6). Through investigating their work further it was hoped that the following might emerge:

- details of innovation in language provision;
- examples of interesting practice that might highlight ways in which colleges can develop their language provision and encourage greater student participation;
- different models of management and funding;
- further insights into issues of common concern in introducing languages.

An initial feasibility study, carried out by FEU in the summer of 1991, had revealed a number of key issues which served as a focus for the project.

Key issues and project focus

- Teaching and learning strategies
- Progression post 16
- Core skills/Languages for all
- Training for industry
- Languages on vocational programmes
- Range of languages
- Range of learners
- Accreditation/recording of achievement
- Staff recruitment and training
- Organisation and management of Languages

Although all the issues identified in the feasibility study were addressed through the project, coverage was inevitably uneven because of the colleges' different priorities in developing languages. For example, most of the colleges focused on the provision of Languages on vocational programmes rather than A, AS level or GCSE provision. In part this reflects the relationship in this sample between the colleges and local schools. Where the main provision of A level and GCSE is in the latter there tend to be tacit agreements that the college will concentrate on vocational programmes. In tertiary colleges the situation will probably be different again.

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It is worth noting that, even with a relatively small sample of institutions, there was evidence of a wide range of approaches to language provision that affected every aspect of organisation. This suggests that many more examples of interesting practice exist in other colleges that the whole sector could benefit from sharing. It is intended that one of the outcomes of the project should be exactly that: a sharing of ideas and practice. **College language co-ordinators and others with experience in this area are invited therefore to contribute to this work either by giving details of successful innovations (or advice learned the hard way !) or by suggesting ways that efforts can be supported locally.**

The colleges in the project were at various stages of developing their Modern Language curriculum, including one that was offering courses for the first time. All of the colleges offer a range of languages at both beginner and a more advanced level.

While it was not the remit of this project to consider the provision of language teaching to students for whom English is not their mother tongue, nor to look in detail at the provision of community languages, it did attempt to draw on the experiences and expertise of teachers in these areas.

Teaching and learning strategies

Most language teaching takes place in a group setting, using the target language with high levels of student involvement. Flexible learning resources were being developed mainly in response to the needs of adult learners.

Providing a vocational focus for language learning was felt by all the colleges to be essential and had resulted in the use of imaginative scenarios (see below) to stimulate interest. There is still, however, a real need for flexible and relevant learning materials and resources.

In College A, a graphic design project was based on the outcomes of a day trip to France: the assignment focussed on the packaging and promotion of French products and the subsequent presentation was made in French and recorded on video.

The same college ran a 'Bistro Week', offering an integrated programme of events involving all those studying French and drawing on their particular vocational expertise.

Women into Engineering

This programme for women returners, offered by College B, includes a language module (German) and incorporates a study visit abroad. The opportunity to gain linguistic skills is popular with the students in this group.

Extending the language experience

All the colleges in the project were enthusiastic about the value of links in other European countries in enabling students to extend their experiences of the language they were studying.

In College A this involved building on civic 'twinning' procedures which resulted in fruitful links with specialised colleges providing for business,secretarial and construction students in the same region of France. Similar opportunities have been established in Spain to include exchange arrangements with a Travel and Tourism college.

College C is exploring the possibilities of establishing links in some of the east European countries, with a particular interest in providing English as a foreign language.

Exchanges

Exchange arrangements are funded or subsidised by a variety of means: some language co-ordinators are drawing on EC funding schemes such as LINGUA where this is appropriate.

Work placements

There are a number of considerations to be taken into account in operating these exchange arrangements, particularly where work placements are involved. These include:

- shortage of placements at a time of economic recession;
- difficulties in matching levels of language skills with the demands of the workplace;
- arrangements needed to monitor and accredit students' progress against course requirements;
- the need to co-ordinate exchange activities across vocational sectors;
- the extra time staff need to organise exchanges, particularly in large multi-site colleges.

College D had established links with a local travel agency so that travellers and holiday-makers could buy language tuition from the college at the same time as their holiday and pay for it at the travel agency.

Progression post 16

The issue of progression in language studies post 16 remains important and the project did not find an easy solution. Establishing a 'Languages for All' policy makes heavy demands on staffing, resources and organisation, and language workshops as a cross-college facility are still in the early stages of development. Students can also be reluctant to consider returning to language study if they have not included it among their options at 14+. It is anticipated that the position of languages in the National Curriculum will have an impact on demand and take-up in the post-16 sector in the near future but there are still progression issues for students moving on from first-level vocational courses to diploma level that will require planning if their language learning is to be developed rather than simply repeated.

The adult centre in the project offers one-term units and counts a high proportion of successive enrolments as evidence of students building on enjoyable learning experiences. In addition, students are offered opportunities through weekend and longer residential courses to enhance their experience of the language.

Languages as a core skill

There is general agreement over the importance of including languages in the post-16 curriculum, particularly with reference to young people achieving equal status in the European workforce and enabling them to take advantage of new opportunities in other member states of the community. Where languages are available to all learners, this signals colleges' commitment to their development and acknowledgment of their importance post-1992. One college went so far as to say, *'It is no longer enough to have a qualification without a linguistic skill'*. In the project colleges, students following vocational courses are the most likely to have a language component as part of their studies.

Access to languages for all — developing a cross-college policy

College A had tried to make a general, cross-college language offer but met with a number of barriers including timetable and resource constraints. There are difficulties in persuading all course tutors of the value of a language component, particularly if it is initiated by the Language department alone. Three of the colleges in the project were in the process of negotiating a position for language provision in their college strategic plan.

Issues highlighted by this process include:

- a recognition that languages have an important part to play in giving the curriculum a European focus;
- the need for shorter, regular contact when timetabling languages provision rather than one long weekly block;
- the need for common timetabling to create groups of a viable size but the possible loss of a vocational stimulus for learners through combining groups with different interests.

Training for Industry

Colleges are well placed to meet the developing needs of industries seeking to extend commercial activity in the EC and beyond. The colleges in the project were involved in varying degrees in working with employers to meet short and longer term language training needs. They are working alongside other agencies such as Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs), Language Export Centres and Chambers of Commerce to identify needs and work collaboratively to provide appropriate training. The ability to offer an audit of language skills is an additional service in some areas. The colleges identify the following points:

- the need to meet demand at short notice;
- the ability to identify training needs and match them with specially designed programmes;
- the ability to deliver high quality training relevant to adult learners;
- the ability to offer training on employers premises at times convenient to the client;
- the need to have realistic costing scales in place and the appropriate administrative support.

It is mainly to meet this market that colleges have begun to develop flexible modes of delivery and open learning materials.

Vocational programmes/range of languages

The project colleges between them offered a language component in most of the vocational sectors traditionally associated with the FE sector. Combinations of French, German, Spanish and Italian at a range of levels are offered to students in:

art and design	business
care	catering
construction	engineering
hairdressing	travel and tourism

German and French are the most commonly offered languages since they offer some continuity with what has been provided pre 16.

College B chose to offer Spanish in order to provide a new and positive experience to students who had not chosen a language option for their last years at secondary school. This is proving a successful innovation and a strong exchange programme is being developed as a result.

In a few cases, language provision involved students slotting into conventional, exam-based courses, mainly GCSE but it was more usual for language provision to have the following characteristics:

- course content devised with a specific vocational sector in mind;
- teaching in the target language;
- a range of student-centred activities balancing speaking, listening and written skills;
- timetable allocation of approximately two hours per week.

College C in the early stages of developing language courses offers its own Diploma in International Studies: students take at least one language at A level, a second one at GCSE level together with basic Japanese and an 'international studies' module. Other A levels can be added to this core. The diploma has been specifically designed with progression routes to local HE institutions that offer degrees with a similar focus.

The project revealed that providing language training for industry resulted in an extended range of languages being offered in order to meet demand. There were examples of Japanese, Russian, Arabic and Norwegian available under these arrangements. Colleges relied on intelligence gained from local Chambers of Commerce or on their own contacts with local employers to tap into these potential markets.

The Adult Centre in the project operates differently. Because of its specific Languages focus it is able to offer a wider range of languages than the other colleges with many students pursuing a qualification. In addition some of the students seek language skills for short-term goals linked to travel, career promotion or expanding commercial markets.

The local education authority (LEA) has a policy of offering language tuition to all employees at a concessionary rate and this client group features prominently at all levels of study. In addition to the established teachers employed at the centre it maintains a directory of native speakers drawn from a wide range of languages. This facility results in their services being called upon for very specific tasks from a variety of agencies, including government departments.

The adult centre is committed to offering training to the native speakers who have no teaching experience.

Accreditation/recording of achievement

The validation of language courses is seen as a crucial influence on the motivation of students. In some cases the language element is offered as an optional unit within BTEC programmes and validated as such. Other means of validation or accreditation in the project included:

- internal college certification;
- GCSE;
- Chartered Institute of Builders;
- FLIC (Foreign Languages for Industry and Commerce) and FLAW (Foreign Languages at Work);
- Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE);
- Institute of Linguists;
- Trinity College.

NCFE offers an extensive range of sector-specific courses and continues to commission new ones. One college is currently designing a course for Caring/NNEB in collaboration with this scheme.

Institute of Linguists and Trinity College are used to accredit initial training courses for prospective teachers and for INSET.

Where colleges are part of an Open College Network language units can be submitted for Open College accreditation. In these colleges adults have opportunities to include units in a foreign language within their overall programme and to gain credit for them.

Achievement in languages was also recorded, in some cases, on college-devised records of achievement for adults.

The project coincided with the establishment of the Languages Lead Body and ran parallel with the pilot phase for Language standards in industry. It was therefore too early for colleges to be able to make detailed predictions of the impact of the standards on their work. Qualifications that require candidates to demonstrate linguistic competence in specific occupational settings, as well as more generic skills, are already a feature of college provision and most of the colleges in the project had been involved in the development and extension of such qualifications. The potential of the Lead Body's Competence Framework for rationalising existing qualifications by basing them on a common set of standards could be seen as an advantage by teachers and trainers.

The requirement by the Further Education Funding Council (FEFC) that learning programmes should result in either progression to another programme or a recognised qualification under Schedule 2 if they are to qualify for FEFC (rather than LEA) funding, is already encouraging some institutions to review their provision and consider whether it should be accredited in some way.

Staff recruitment and training

The high proportion of part-time teachers in the Language departments of the project colleges is a common characteristic of many other institutions and the increased demand placed on schools by the implementation of the National Curriculum is creating a need for even more language teachers.

The project found healthy levels of staff development in all the colleges,with examples of training extended to other institutions.

College B is working in partnership with the LEA Inspectorate and schools sector to meet the shortage by increasing the skills of existing teachers. This is achieved either by providing *ab initio* courses or by tapping into the skills of any second language that may have been studied at some stage of their education. It is possible for language teachers to work towards validation via the Institute of Linguists examinations by this method.

The two colleges that run initial training courses for language teaching,validated by RSA and Trinity College have, on occasion been able to recruit staff directly from this source.

The adult centre with its proportionately greater numbers of courses and consequently many more part-time staff, places a high priority on ensuring a regular training programme for teachers. The sessions, run during the week or occasionally on Saturdays, are always attended to capacity. Training is free for those employed by the Local Authority.

The development of qualifications based on the Languages standards has implications for staff training. Language teachers have generally not been directly involved with NVQ developments and this, combined with the high proportion of part time teachers, means that levels of awareness vary considerably. Language co-ordinators recognise the need for basic information about competence-based qualifications and predict a need for extensive staff development.

Organisation and management of languages

Although this was not an area of concern identified by the feasibility study it became apparent early in the project that the organisation and management of languages provision merited investigation. The location of language provision within colleges and the ways in which this area of work was organised varied considerably.

In College C the decision was taken to locate languages in one of the vocational departments because the head had overall responsibility for European developments.

In contrast, College B which is under re-organisation was considering including languages as part of its cross-college provision, rather than locating it in a particular department.

In College D there had been impressive developments in languages through the Training and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI).

Whatever model is chosen, increased emphasis on foreign language learning and subsequent growth in provision highlight the need for a coherent planned offer and a development strategy that relate to the institution's overall development plan.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS IN LANGUAGES

During the course of the project a number of important national developments occurred. Some, like the development by the Languages Lead Body of national standards for Languages, will eventually affect a large number of areas of language teaching and learning. Others, like the introduction of General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs), have perhaps served to highlight the position of Languages in vocational programmes.

An overview of recent national developments in Languages is given below in a brief summary of key initiatives.

National Curriculum

A Modern Foreign Language was introduced as a National Curriculum Foundation Subject in schools in August 1992. It is statutory only at Key Stages 3 and 4 and therefore not a requirement before the age of 11, although learning may begin at an earlier age in some middle and primary schools.

An MFL must be studied until the age of 16 although it will be possible to follow a programme of study taking less curriculum time and leading to certification as part of a combined GCSE with another subject, for example Spanish and Business Studies or French with IT. An approved list of combinations will be published by the DFE in due course.

The first assessments in an MFL at the end of Key Stage 4 (through GCSE) will be in Summer 1997 so the first cohort of students would enter FE in September 1997.

The inclusion of MFLs within the National Curriculum will inevitably have implications for FE. All pupils will have had opportunities to develop their language skills in a range of contexts including broadly vocational ones such as the World of Work. In addition, some students will have followed courses with a more specific vocational slant through combined GCSEs involving an MFL. It will be even more important, therefore, to ensure that FE programmes recognise and build on students' experience and take account, in particular, of the vocational context in which some of the learning will have taken place.

Languages Lead Body

The Languages Lead Body was formed in 1990 with the primary aim of increasing the modern foreign language capability of the UK workforce. Devising language standards with which to accredit language learning has been the major focus of their work. The Lead Body's competence framework should, in common with NVQs in general, result in the rationalisation of many existing qualifications. Awarding Bodies are already redesigning their qualifications to take account of the standards.

The Lead Body's Competence Framework includes both generic units designed to meet the needs of those requiring competence in foreign languages within their occupation and specific units in translating and interpreting designed to meet the needs of those who are expected to translate or interpret a modern foreign language either as part of their work role or in their capacity as professional translators and interpreters. Generic units exist at five levels corresponding to the levels in the NVQ Framework. Units in translating and interpreting have yet to be ascribed precise levels but it is likely they will be available only at levels four and five.

The generic units are designed for use within NVQs and GNVQs in a range of occupations and vocational areas. They can also be used to accredit competence in a foreign language as part of any course of study or learning programme.

Languages and GNVQs

At present only GNVQs at level 3 in Leisure and Tourism and Business include optional units in a foreign language, based on the Languages Lead Body standards. These are in the areas of listening and speaking at a minimum of level 2 (see Figure 1). Any GNVQ programme can, however, include languages as additional units at any level. Nor is there any requirement to restrict language achievement to listening and speaking. If learners want to develop their reading and writing skills, they can do so and gain credit for these as additional units.

Similarly, students following a GNVQ programme can prepare for other forms of additional certification in a foreign language if these are felt to be more appropriate (GCSE, A or AS level).

GNVQs were introduced in 52 FE and sixth-form colleges in September 1992. In a recent FEU survey, of the 34 colleges that responded to FEU's questionnaire, 21 were offering Languages as part of their GNVQ programme. Others planned to do so the following year. The majority of these offering languages (16) were using the GNVQ units rather than other means of accreditation and were attempting to use the vocational areas as a focus for language learning.

Level descriptors used in the language standards framework

Level 1
Competence in a range of predictable simple language tasks.

Level 2
Competence in a range of language tasks, performed in familiar work and social contexts. Some of these tasks are non-routine, and the individual is expected to use a limited range of language to meet the needs of differing but familiar situations and topics.

Level 3
Competence in a broad range of factual, persuasive and expressive language tasks performed in a variety of contexts. Most language tasks require decision making to select appropriate language; and the individual is expected to be able to combine and recombine language elements to accomplish key work tasks.

Level 4
Competence in a broad range of complex or technical language tasks, performed in a wide variety of contexts and with a substantial requirement to select and adapt appropriate language strategies. The individual is expected to make and respond to a wide range of spontaneous foreign language interventions and to infer or express implicit and multiple meaning for a wide variety of work and social purposes.

Level 5
Competence in a broad range of complex and non-routine tasks across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts; and which involves the application of a significant range of language strategies selected from an extensive repertoire, which the individual continuously updates to meet changing requirements.

Figure 1.

Languages Lead Body: *National Language Standards*
May 1993

Languages and core skills

There has been much debate as to whether competence in a foreign language should be classified and included as a core skill. For the moment there are no plans officially to do so. However, the Lead Body units were initially designed to take account of core skill developments and can be used to accredit students studying a language as, say, part of an entitlement programme.

A and AS levels in languages

The Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC) is currently identifying the subject core for all A- and AS-level examinations including languages.

REFERENCE

1. FEFC circular no.92/15: *Sponsorship for external institutions*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful to the following organisations and their representatives for their contributions to FEU's work on Languages:

CILT, NATFHE ,LINGUA, BTEC, City and Guilds , RSA, Institute of Linguists, London Chamber of Commerce, NCVQ ,Languages Lead Body, West Midlands Euro-Unit, UK Lingua Unit, ALEC (Association of Language Export Centres), Association of Language Learning, NCET, National Association of Language Advisors, SEAC, NCC, YHAFHE, York University — Department of Language and Linguistic Science.

Colleges taking part in RP678
Basingstoke College of Technology
Brasshouse Centre, Birmingham
Coventry Technical College
Liverpool City Colleges
North Tyneside College
Pontypridd College

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ISBN 1 85338 309 0

FEU registered charity number 326347

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